

Washington State Patrol Media Release

Chief John R. Batiste



Captain Jeff DeVere
Government and Media Relations
(360) 753-5299 – office
(360) 753-5469 – fax
<http://www.wsp.wa.gov>

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**Contact: Gary Lindsay, WSU (509) 335-8522;
Barbara Chamberlain, WSU (509) 358-7527;
Barbara Petura, WSU (509) 335-1980; or
WSP Office of Government and Media Relations (360) 753-5299**

Racial Profiling Study on WSP Released

Phase three of the *Washington State University* (WSU) traffic stop analysis analyzed over 1.2 million traffic stops between November 1, 2002 and June 30, 2004 to investigate possible patterns of racial profiling or biased policing being reflected in the work of the Washington State Patrol (WSP). In a 93-page document delivered to Chief John R. Batiste, the WSU research team concludes that there is no evidence of a systematic problem with biased policing within the Washington State Patrol.

Phase three of the WSU traffic stop analysis continues to build upon phase 2 of the study which was released in June 2003, analyzing the traffic stop and search data of the WSP. Additionally, the phase three report includes an audit on the WSP data provided for the analysis. This audit shows that driver race/ethnicity coding contained in the WSP data is accurate. Separate evaluation of driver race/ethnicity conducted by WSU was 95% consistent with trooper coding.

"I am very proud of our troopers and what they are doing every day to ensure public safety in the state of Washington, this independent analysis confirms this fact," said Chief Batiste. "We will continue to work hard to provide public safety in a fair and just manner, and provide this information to the public because it is the right thing to do."

"The State Patrol continues to take the lead in the United States by requesting this outside, objective review of their work," said Nicholas Lovrich, Ph.D., Director of the WSU Division of Governmental Studies and Services. "By collecting this type of data, a clear message is sent that racially biased policing is not consistent with the mission and values of the WSP which entail providing effective and equitable public safety services to the citizens of Washington State."

The research team, which included Professors Clayton Mosher, Mitch Pickerill, and Travis Pratt and Senior Researcher Michael Gaffney, concluded that there are no significant disparities in **stop or citation** rates observed across ethnic/racial classifications of drivers.

Because the WSP only issues tickets in about 30% of its traffic stops, the WSU team carefully evaluated whether or not any particular ethnic group was receiving a higher rate of citation over other groups. Using a multivariate statistical model, the data analysis performed clearly demonstrated that the decision of whether or not to cite was more likely to be based upon contextual factors such as the seriousness of the violation and the number of offenses observed by the trooper than the person's race or ethnicity.

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According to the report, **“results indicate that there is no systematic pattern of disproportionate contact by race or ethnicity with regard to troopers’ decisions to stop motorists, nor is there evidence of systematic racial differences with regard to troopers’ decisions to issue citations versus warnings after traffic stops were initiated when key contextual variables are included in a multivariate analysis.”**

In addition to the analysis of traffic stop data, the WSU research team also analyzed WSP searches.

According to the report, **“multivariate statistical analysis indicates that race is, at most, but one of a number of factors influencing the decision of a WSP trooper to initiate a discretionary search. Other measured factors, such as the seriousness of the violation, are much stronger predictors of troopers’ decision to initiate a search after a traffic stop.”**

However, WSU researchers indicate that it is necessary to obtain additional information before firm conclusions are drawn with regard to WSP search activity. Following the 2003 report, WSU found that searches needed to be coded more accurately. Since that study, there has been a substantial improvement in reducing the number of observations in which the search field is left blank for DUI with test. The WSP will continue to look at this issue and address it in the training provided to officers in the field.

While the overall results of this study show there is no systematic racial differences with regard to the decision to issue citations, the WSU data analysis does document in some APAs a high rate of offense on certain types of violations for specific groups of drivers such as Native Americans and Latinos.

“We take the trends shown through the report very seriously,” said Chief John R. Batiste. “These issues will be closely looked at by the WSP to determine if there is a need for increased education/outreach within those communities.”

It is important to note that following the 2003 report the WSP attended a series of town meetings to solicit feedback and address concerns of the citizens. One of these town hall meetings resulted in a suggestion to produce a brochure educating the Spanish speaking community on what to expect/do if they were stopped by the WSP. This brochure was produced in both English and Spanish and distributed state-wide. In addition, through the use of the WSP Police Oriented Public Safety (POPS) project, a trooper in the District 3 area (Trooper Ray Gonzalez) identified a concern for the number of collisions involving Hispanic/Latino-surnamed drivers and launched *El Protector*, a program designed to address traffic safety in the region through active educational outreach efforts. Just one year after the program began, fatality collisions involving Hispanic/Latino drivers dropped 41% during harvest season.

The WSP plans on taking the information learned from the 2005 WSU study and do the same thing again this year. The WSP will be participating in town hall meetings and/or community group meetings to talk about issues and concerns relating to this study, and to develop ways we can reach out to educate all citizens in Washington State on public safety issues.

According to the report, “The statewide citizen survey indicates a high level of satisfaction with the WSP. Some differences do exist between minority and non-minority citizens; however, our statistical analysis suggests that the race-gap in reported satisfaction with agency services has to do with the perception of racial profiling on the part of the minority respondents. Minority citizens’ lower satisfaction ratings are fully mediated by whether or not they believe the WSP engages in racial profiling.”

“The future of law enforcement is shaped by the decisions we make today,” said Chief Batiste. “This independent study shows that the WSP is committed to earning the trust and legitimacy from the community we serve. We will continue to look at ourselves closely, and if something needs to be fixed we will fix it,” he said, adding “the public expects a relationship built on trust, the WSP is working to strengthen that relationship, as it is vital to our efforts in implementing the WSP’s community-based policing philosophy.”

To review the WSU study, please visit the WSP Web site (www.wsp.wa.gov). There is a link to the study on the home page.